The REFORMED JOURNAL

ume 5 — No. 8 A Periodical of Reformed Comment and Opinion September, 1955

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# Herman Bavinck*

by HENRY ZYLSTRA

THOSE who are at all familiar ith the history of the Reformed urches of the Netherlands — that is, the *Gereformeerde* as distinguished om the *Hervormde kerken* — will ow that among the heirs of the *fscheiding* of 1836 and the *Doleantie* 1886 no two names are held in such steem as the names of Abraham Kuyer and Herman Bavinck. They were eroic figures of giant accomplishment Christian endeavor. Their career roughly the same time at the end of e last and the beginning of this cenury must be regarded as a special favor f God for the benefit of historic Chrisanity in both Europe and the new orld.

The two men, who in time came to e mentioned so often in one breath as o-stalwarts of the Reformed cause in Holland, have often been compared nd contrasted. Somebody put the ifference between them in this way: In Kuyper we have an example of cintillating genius, in Bavinck an exmple of clear-headed talent." The ev. J. H. Landwehr, Bavinck's first iographer, reports another contrast: Bavinck was an Aristotelian, Kuyper Platonic spirit. Bavinck was the man f the clear concept, Kuyper the man f the fecund idea. Bavinck worked ith the historically given; Kuyper roceeded speculatively by way of inuition. Bavinck's was primarily an nductive mind; Kuyper's primarily deductive." The two men complemented each other in the renascence of Calvinist vitality in nineteenth century Dutch life and thought.

Herman Bavinck was born on December 13, 1854. The centennial of his birth was widely celebrated in the Netherlands last year, and the nature and scope of his contributions were appreciatively reviewed. Bavinck was born in the town of Hoogeveen in the province of Drenthe. His people originally came from the county or earldom of Bentheim. His father, the Rev. Jan Bavinck, was a minister of the churches which in 1836 had, in the interest of maintaining purely the tradition of historic Christianity, separated from the State Church of Holland.

The young Bavinck achieved dstinction as a student in the gymnasium at Zwolle and then went to the Theological School of his church at Kampen. Here he remained for but a year. He chose then to go to Leiden for his further theological training. Leiden gave him at least two things: a respect for substantial scholarship, and an acquaintance at first hand with the liberally affected modern theology. Both lessons served him well. The ideal of solid theological scholarship for orthodox Reformed Christianity stood high in his life throughout his career. And his intimate acquaintance with the newer religious thought both deepened his Calvinist convictions and fitted him for a profession of theology realistically addressed to the problems of the time.

In 1880 he graduated from Leiden, having done a dissertation on the ethics of Ulrich Zwingli. He served as minister of the church at Franeker for a year, and was then appointed Professor of Dogmatics at the Theological School of Kampen. The subject of his inaugural address, "The Science of Holy Divinity" (*De Wetenschap der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, 1882), fascinated him all his life. During the decade of his arduous study and effective teaching at Kampen, Bavinck three times received the offer of a professorship in theology at the Free University of Amsterdam. He accepted it only after the third offer, and only after he could satisfy his conscience (see his brochure *Decline or Accept*: *Blijven of Heengaan*,

*This article will constitute the introduction to the translation of Bavinck's *Magnalia Dei* which will be published soon under the title *Our Reasonable Faith* by the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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# Herman Bavinck — Continued

Kampen, 1902) that he was not harming the integrity of theological education in his church. It was when Abraham Kuyper exchanged a professor's portfolio at Amsterdam for a minister's portfolio in the government at The Hague that Bavinck became Kuyper's successor at the Free University.

Bavinck was primarily the theologian, the dogmatician. His *magnum opus* is the four volumes of his Reformed Dogmatics (*Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*). It was the fruit of his Kampen effort, appearing first during the years 1895-1901, and then, in revised form, in 1906-1911 and later. One volume of this work, *The Doctrine of God*, edited and translated by Dr. W. Hendriksen, was published in Grand Rapids in 1951. The present volume, *Our Reasonable Faith*, given out in 1909 as the *Magnalia Dei* (*The Wonderful Works of God*), is a compendium or synopsis of the four-volume *Dogmatics*. *Our Reasonable Faith* is less technical, less exclusively professional, more popularly intended than the *Dogmatics*, and is more fully supported by Scriptural reference and annotation, but it is, like the larger work, a book of basic Christian dogma. It presents clearly and in fine perspective the fundamental doctrines of Biblical teaching.

Some have said that Bavinck was more the philosopher than the theologian. It is true that his theology exhibits the discipline of the trained and informed philosopher. But what Bavinck wanted first of all to be in his dogmatics was the Scriptural theologian. It is as Landwehr said: "Just as Calvin gathered his thoughts out of Scripture, so Bavinck was always dipping into the Bible for his ideas, and was being guided by Scripture in his systematization of them." Moreover, in his profession of theology he was not the detached spectator non-committally looking in on the reality of religion. In his Amsterdam inaugural address, *Religion and Theology* (*Godsdienst en Godgeleerdheid*, 1902), he said:

> "Religion, the fear of God, must therefore be the element which inspires and animates all theological investigation. That must be the pulsebeat of the science. A theologian is a person who makes bold to speak about God because he speaks out of God and through God. To profess theology is to do holy work. It is a priestly ministration in the house of the Lord. It is itself a service of worship, a consecration of mind and heart to the honor of His name."

It was thus that Bavinck conducted his profession. His former student, Landwehr, reports how things went in the classroom: The lecture, he says, became a sermon, as the professor was stirred by the truth. And most of his biographers record the words he uttered during his final illness: "Now my scholarship avails me nothing, nor my dogmatics: it is only my faith can save me." In that statement he was not disparaging a life of scientific theological effort but simply indicating the right order of importances.

When Dr. J. C. Rullman submitted his article on Bavinck to the *Christelijke Encyclopaedie* in 1925 he felt that he could hardly do better towards characterizing Bavinck's work than to quote from Bavinck's colleague at the Free University, Dr. W. J. Geesink. The quotation is useful here also. Dr. Geesink wrote in effect — he was, of course, using the Dutch:

> "As professor, Bavinck would have ranked high on any university faculty. His tremendous erudition and his wide reading became richly expressive in the classroom. A keenly penetrating scholar, he had a gift for discovering problems, and when he discovered one he could convey it to his audience in unencumbered terms. If he had a solution to it, he shared the solution also, never hurriedly but with deliberateness and calm. And if he did not yet have a solution, his scholarly integrity kept him from palming off one which was illusory, and in which one term of the problem was satisfied at the cost of annihilating the other. And, what with his respect for logic and his thorough discipline at school, he knew far too well the dangers of irrationalism not to acknowledge that there are some problems that cannot be solved.
>
> "As theologian and dogmatician by profession, Bavinck went back to Calvin for his Reformed theology. By doing this, and by taking accoun also, though not without criticism and reservation, of modern scholar ship and science, he helped liberat Reformed theology from the harden ing and ossification it had under gone since about 1750 . . . Like Augustine, whom he placed in th van of all thinkers before and afte the fourth century, he looked to philosophy of revelation for an an swer to the problems of life and th world — for an answer, be it saic that would satisfy both the hear and the mind."

Bavinck wrote an impressive numbe of substantial works in the areas of rel gion and theology, philosophy and ap plied ethics, and, especially too, psy chology and the theory of education The bibliography of his published work which includes besides full length vo umes the many inaugural, rectoral, an other academic addresses which h gave, but which does not include h busy journalistic work, runs to som sixty items in Landwehr's tabulation In the province of religion and theo ogy, the following publications deserv mention in addition to the *Reforme Dogmatics* and *Our Reasonable Faith* In 1888 he gave out his little timeles classic on ecumenicity entitled *Th Catholicity of Christianity and th*

The Reformed Journal

VOLUME V NO. 8
SEPTEMBER, 1955

*A Periodical of Reformed Comment and Opinion*

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Published each month by the
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
**Subscription price: $2.00 per year**
Entered as Second Class Matter at the Postoffice at Grand Rapids, Mich.
Address all subscriptions and communications to:
**THE REFORMED JOURNAL**
**255 Jefferson Avenue, S. E.**
**Grand Rapids 3, Mich.**

*Church* (*De Katholiciteit van Christendom en Kerk*). In 1894 there followed a definitive lecture on a theme first delineated by Calvin, and also greatly developed by Abraham Kuyper, namely, *Common Grace* (*De Algemeene Genade*). His beautiful meditations in *The Sacrifice of Praise* (*De Offerande des Lofs*, 1901) had gone into the sixth edition by the time of his death, and were translated into English and published in this country in 1922. A sort of companion volume, *The Assurance of Faith* (*De Zekerheid des Geloofs*), was published in the same year. Important, too, is his rectoral address of 1911 entitled *Modernism and Orthodoxy* (*Modernisme en Orthodoxie*).

Among his more philosophically oriented books are the Princeton Stone Lectures, delivered in 1908 and published the next following year as *The Philosophy of Revelation*, the *Present Day Ethics* (*Hedendaagsche Moraal*, 1902), and the two philosophical lectures of 1904 entitled *Christian Philosophy* (*Christelijke Wetenschap*) and *The Christian World and Life View* (*Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*). A theme which occupied Bavinck again and again and one to which he devoted some of his ripest reflection was that of the inter-relationship of religion and learning. No institution of orthodox higher Christian education ought to ignore his many publications on this subject: *Religion and Divinity* (*Godsdienst en Godgeleerdheid*, 1902), *Education and Theology* (*Opleiding en Theologie*, 1896), *The Office of Doctor or Professor of Theology* (*Het Doctorenambt*, 1899), *Learning and Philosophy* (*Geleerdheid en Wetenschap*, 1899), *The Authority of the Church and the Freedom of Science* (*Het Recht der Kerken en de Vrijheid der Wetenschap*, 1899), and *The Theological School and the Free University* (*Theologische School en Vrije Universiteit*, 1899).

It was during the later years of his professional life that Bavinck became expressive in those two further provinces of life and thought, namely applied ethics and morally grounded psychology. To the first category of interest belong such works as *The Role of Woman in Modern Society* (*De Vrouw in de Hedendaagsche Maatschappij*, 1918), *The Christian Family* (*Het Christelijke Huisgezin*, 1908), *The Imitation of Christ in Modern Life* (*De Navolging van Christus in het Moderne Leven*, 1918), *The Problem of War* (*Het Probleem van den Oorlog*, 1915), and *Christianity, War, and a League of Nations* (*Christendom, Oorlog, Volkenbond*, 1920). The last named work reminds us how far into the problems of our century Bavinck's interest extended. Indeed, it must be said that he had a fine "sense of his own age." This accounts in part for his pronounced concern with psychology and the principles of education. In 1915 came the treatise *On the Sub-Conscious* (*Het Onbewuste*), in 1897 *The Principles of Psychology* (*Beginselen der Psychologie*), and in 1920 *Biblical and Religious Psychology* (*Bijbelsche and Religieuse Psychologie*). His major work in the theory of education is the *Pedagogical Principles* (*Paedagogische Beginselen*, 1904). It is no wonder that this area of his achievement should have attracted considerable attention. Dr. Cornelius Jaarsma's *The Educational Philosophy of Herman Bavinck* (Grand Rapids, 1935) and L. Van der Zweep's *De Paedagogiek van Bavinck* (Kampen, n.d.) are representative of it.

Herman Bavinck twice visited America, first in 1892 when he was invited by the Alliance of Reformed Churches Holding the Presbyterian System to address that body meeting in Toronto on the subject: "The Influence of the Protestant Reformation on the Moral and Religious Conditions of Peoples and Nations"; and next in 1908 when he demonstrated by his Stone Lectures at Princeton that he deserved to be named with Kuyper, Warfield, Hodge, and Orr as outstanding among modern Calvinist theologians. In practical political life he was far less active than Kuyper, his bent being for political philosophy rather than for politics. He was, however, a member of the Upper House representing South Holland in the States General from the year 1911 on. His best services in this capacity were given as consultant and advisor in education. The translation of his works into English has been fitful and scattered. Thus far only *The Sacrifice of Praise*, *The Kingdom of God*, *The Philosophy of Revelation*, and the little treatise *Evolution* have appeared. *Our Reasonable Faith* is, accordingly, an important addition. There has as yet been no definitive biography. Three precursors to it have, however, been written. The first is J. H. Landwehr's *In Memoriam* of 1921, the next Dr. V. Hepp's *Dr. Herman Bavinck* of the same year — the promised second volume sequel to this was never produced — and the third is A. B. W. M. Kok's *Herman Bavinck* of 1945. A quantity of Dutch periodical studies have gone to the analysis of Bavinck's ideas. In this country we have had, besides Dr. Jaarsma's book, also the unpublished doctoral dissertation for Princeton of Dr. Anthony Hoekema on Bavinck's idea of the Covenant. Recently, too, Dr. Bastian Kruithof achieved his doctorate at Edinburgh with a thesis on Bavinck's philosophy of culture.

It can be said that in the whole of his apology for Scriptural Reformed Christianity Bavinck had four opposing influences in mind, two of them outside and two of them inside the pale of the Reformed faith. The two outside influences were modern religious liberalism and Roman Catholicism. The two inside influences were a moribund formal orthodoxy, an the one hand, and an evasive pietism, on the other. He spoke often and eloquently against all of these forces. Note, for example, with what feeling and with what perspective he advocated the world involvement of a universal Calvinism instead of the world flight of a sectarian pietism:

> "We may not be a sect. We may not want to be one, and we cannot be one, except by a denial of the absolute character of the truth. Indeed, the kingdom of heaven is not of this world. But it does demand that everything in this world serve it. It is exclusive and jealous, and it will indulge no independent or neutral kingdom of the world alongside of itself. Naturally, it would be much easier to leave this age to its own ways, and to seek our strength in a quiet withdrawal. No such rest, however, is permitted to us here. Because every creature is good, and nothing is to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving, since all things are sanctified by the Word of God and prayer, therefore the rejection of any creature were ingratitude to God, a misjudgment or under-evaluation of His goodness and His gifts. Our warfare may be conducted against sin alone. No matter how complicated the relationships may be, therefore, in which the confessors of Christ are placed in this time, no matter how serious, difficult, and virtually insurmountable the so-

## Herman Bavinck — Continued

cial, political, and especially the scientific problems may be, it were faithlessness and weakness in us proudly to withdraw from the struggle, perhaps even under the guise of Christian motivation, and to reject the culture of the age as demonic."

That is one of the notes which Bavinck liked to sound in his defense of the faith. He sounded it in the address entitled *The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church.* It is a representative statement. "The faith," he went on, "has the promise of victory over the world." Dr. Hepp very appropriately wrote at the conclusion of his biography of Bavinck these words:

"What he once said of Calvin, holds also for him: Posterity "can find no better way to honor their pioneer and guide than to confess with heart and mouth: Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever."

# American Religious Characteristics — II

by JOHN H. KROMMINGA

In a preceding article we noted that the American churches were transformed from the European type to voluntaryistic organizations. We designated the period between 1787 and 1850 as the formative period. We discussed the first two of six formative influences which went into that transformation. As we proceed now to discuss the remaining four, let us bear in mind one other thing previously noted. The Christian Reformed Church, by the date of her entry into this scene, the nature of her growth to date, and the defensive attitude adopted toward the environment from the first, has been kept to some extent from this Americanizing development. To what extent this is true we shall now continue to explore. (It is true, of course, that other groups besides our own arrived in America after the formative period was over and have been fed by immigration. But few of these have the strong creedal heritage which we possess. This is a measure of the uniqueness of our situation.)

### I The Mission Enterprise

We have previously noted the influence of the purposive principle — that a denomination is delineated by the goals which it seeks. The great influence of Pietism in America gave this characteristic a further impetus. In America, as elsewhere, Pietism contributed a renewed interest in missions. It therefore combined with voluntaryism to make the church's objectives important, and the mission objectives pursued by the various churches came to define the character of those churches.

Interest in missions is itself a good thing. American enthusiasm for missions both at home and abroad is one of the wonders of the world. But in the American context, in which objectives were allowed to define the church, this emphasis had several detrimental side-effects.

First it is to be noted that the conversion of the unchurched involves two elements. The first is the conversion of the individual to God, and the second is the commitment of the individual to whatever the particular group is doing. The latter defines for him the Christian life in practice. But the trouble is that the second may come to outweigh the first by so far that the first is almost lost from view. The denominations come to accept as members all who will subscribe to their program of activity. The constant tendency for the formerly exclusive denominations is to move in the direction of a loosely inclusive membership. It becomes possible after a while for a man to be a member of a Christian church without believing in God!

Furthermore, the potent combination of voluntaryism and the sense of mission becomes the basis for inter-denominational and super-denominational cooperation. One of the most striking features of the American missionary effort is the combination of members of many denominations in inclusive mission boards. These have not always been cooperative efforts between denominations. Much more characteristically they have united individuals, who have by-passed their denominations, and thereby they have become super-denominations, doing the work of the Church in missions.

A further — and closely related — development is the peculiar American conception of ecumenicity. Of the two main emphases in the World Council of Churches, Americans have leaned much more heavily toward "Life and Work" than they have toward "Faith and Order." This is not in the least surprising; it is characteristic of the American approach to local problems of unity. The Federal Council of Churches was basically a cooperative enterprise for the achieving of certain social goals. Ecumenicity, in the American understanding, means working together rather than theological agreement. If theology divides, then let us not speak about it!

That this is the direct outcome of the American attitude toward the missionary enterprise is more clearly seen when we consider a fourth result. Changes in mission objective have brought about changes in the very character of the denominations. Originally conversions of individuals were sought with tremendous effects upon American church membership figures. But under the leadership of the top men in various denominations, this goal made way for an emphasis on social betterment and reconstruction.

We have then to note one last sad consequence in this chain of reaction. Even the second mission objective has not satisfied the American church. After a brief flurry of high optimism it began to become apparent that the interpretation of society with the Christian message was not the all-satisfying mission objective. It was not fully satisfactory at home, and was actively resented and resisted on foreign mission fields. Not all of the lesser theologic

ights have yet come to the formal criticism and repudiation of the social mission objective. But there is widespread dissatisfaction with it. The zest has gone out of the effort. Something new will have to be found. For this combination of the rejection of one objective and the failure of another has destroyed the purposive core of American denominations and set them adrift.

* * *

Fundamentalism, neo-orthodoxy, and the John T. Flynn type of reactionism have responded to this development. But our concern is with what our reaction ought to be. On the one hand, our differences from the American environment provide some basis for encouragement. By the very fact that we have not become completely Americanized, we are in a position to give a distinctive answer. We do not have as much to repent of as the average American denomination. But what shall our answer be? Whatever it is, it will have to be more intellectually respectable than the general answers of Fundamentalism; more soundly Scriptural than the answer of neo-orthodoxy; more concerned with social ills than blind reactionism.

Let me remark parenthetically that we may have to make some distinctively Christian qualifications on this matter of being intellectually respectable. My use of that term is not intended to mean that our "answer," whatever it is, must be in harmony with all of what is called modern learning. Perhaps it will have to include a distinct and definite repudiation of many basic elements in the "modern" intellectual spirit. It may be that we will have to take a leaf from the notebook of Kierkegaard — with due reservations, of course — and assert the discontinuity in some respects of revelation with what has come to pass as reason. We may have to shout to a scientific age that there is a necessary disharmony between what God says about man and what man, having relegated God's Word to the discard, says about himself. But if we are to do this with any impact upon our fellow men, we must do so in language which they can understand and with the clear indication that *we* understand their position and the appeal that it has for them. That we have tried to hold to revealed truth throughout several centuries in which it was extremely unpopular to do so has inevitably made us somewhat defensive. But now that the foundations of modern optimism are shaken, we must make some adjustments in our language and speak to our age. I am not predicting that we shall be equal to this task; but the first step is to see the task.

The burning and self-searching question becomes this; do we have within ourselves the theological competence, the commitment to our task, the sense of mission, to provide an answer or even attempt to do so? If individual soul winning is not the whole of the task, what shall we add to it? How shall we go about the task of the Church, once we have defined it? What results shall we expect?

Christian schools, Christian labor organizations, Christian institutions of mercy are an attempt at an answer. But even if we make them the whole of our answer, they will have varying success. We ourselves have yet to cover a great deal of ground in getting a well-rounded philosophy of Christian education and a constructive program for Christian labor. These organizations are one thing if used only for our own service. If intended to make an impact on the neighbor, much more thinking and planning is demanded with respect to them.

One great advantage which we have is that we have never yet allowed conversion to God to be lost as our primary mission objective. But even here we have a serious problem in deciding just what we shall require in admitting converts to our church. If we admire the mission approach of the American Church, shall we also permit mission objectives to determine our character, or shall we continue to be formed by doctrinal considerations? It is the circuit-rider technique, the Arminian gospel, the revival that have made the great gains in membership in the American Church. We are still looking for such a point of contact. We have a Gospel which few others have and which America needs. How shall we bring it without losing it in the process? A great opportunity beckons to us here, but the difficulties, within and without, are also great. It remains to be seen whether we have the strength to meet them.

## II Revivalism

IT is time now to take a closer look at revivalism, one of the principal formative influences in shaping the American religious situation. When the churches of the new world were thrown on their own resources for gaining members, revivalism soon emerged as the standard technique for almost all denominations. It is not at all surprising that this should have been the case. The task was truly tremendous, with more than ninety per cent of the population outside of the Church. The method, especially as epitomized in such a man as George Whitefield, was glamorous. Even more important, it brought results.

But the gains were accompanied by losses, the threat of which was quickly recognized by some leaders in the colonies. What they recognized was that revivalism tends to destroy all the traditional churchly standards of doctrine and practice. The reasons for this have been variously stated. We shall continue to follow Mead in his delineation of them.

First, revivalism oversimplifies theological problems. Wishing to appeal to the common people, and to be effective among them, the revivalist is encouraged to reduce all choices to one simple alternative.

Second, revivalism gravitates in a "whosoever will" direction. It is thus particularly destructive of that theological emphasis which stresses God's sovereignty. And because of the sound Scriptural support for the doctrine of sovereignty, revivalism carries in its train inevitable implications for the way in which Scripture is interpreted and applied. Much of American theology has fallen into far worse pitfalls than even Arminianism. But, surprising as it may seem, revivalism and its concomitant Arminian emphasis was the broad gate by which American theology entered this downward road. True enough, many of the early revivalists were personally Calvinistic. But this was an anomaly, which subsequent events brought into its true light.

Third, revivalism has tended toward the idea that the end justifies the means. The results are everything; the means are judged by a purely pragmatic standard. Finney justified his new theological emphases and his questionable intrusions on the basis of the argument that they got results. Moody held that it makes no difference how you get a man to God, provided you get him there. And Billy Sunday amply applied the latter contention in his antics.

# American Religious Characteristics — Continued

Fourth, revivalism, like voluntaryism, tended to bring the demagogue to the fore in place of the theologian. Men were needed, it seemed, who could speak to the common people on their own level. This was the religious phase of the general levelling process which was going on at the time in the new democracy.

Fifth, under the impact of the idea that the Christian life consisted of periods of dullness interspersed by periods of exaltation, Christian nurture suffered grievously. Not only was it neglected, but the idea was even advanced that one ought to allow people to be sinners, that they might be gloriously saved. Among other side effects, this hurt the position of the regular pastor in his flock. He was considered far less important than the itinerant who could come from outside and stir the people up.

And to mention one other effect, revivalism in general fostered an anti-intellectual bias. Little room was left for the traditional role of the Christian minister as intellectual leader.

It is illuminating to us to consider that the stoutest resistance to revivalism was put up by our spiritual kinsmen, the Presbyterians. But, by a process of fragmentation and inner strife, even they came to make concessions to it. It is interesting also that what saved the Lutherans from becoming a typical American denomination in this respect was immigration.

* * *

The fact that we share both the Presbyterian principles which provided the strongest resistance to revivalism and the Lutheran type of immigration which saved them from this devleopment is reflected in the fact that the Christian Reformed Church has not adopted revivalism as its means of self-propagation. But that does not solve our problem. In which direction do we turn now? What means shall we devise to achieve the goal at which revivalism aimed without falling into the undesirable results which revivalism carries with itself? Christian nurture is an essential element of the Church's approach to life; but is this a means for contacting the unchurched? Can we eat our cake and have it too? Can we have the inward security which results from Christian nurture and also that impact on the outside for which revivalism has become the standard technique? Do we dare to fly in the face of history and declare that we can have a type of revivalism which will not have detrimental long-range effects upon us?

It is evident from remarks among our members that this problem has its impact upon us. If on the one end of the scale we have lost intellectuals who felt that we were stifling American progress in European conservatism, we have also lost earnest members who felt that there was no room for evangelistic fervor in the Christian Reformed Church. We know them to be wrong; but who has the answer to the problems posed by revivalism? Somebody, somewhere, may have the answer and may be using it. But the answer is not yet the property of the whole denomination.

### III The Flight from Reason

The fifth formative influence in American religion was the flight from reason. This was born out of an unhappy marriage between non-intellectual Pietism and scholastic orthodoxy. Between them they helped shape an American religion which was either indifferent to or actively hostile to the intellectual currents in Western civilization.

We have space enough only to mention a few of the singal failures of American theology to which this gave rise. One is that no theological theory was devised to fit political democracy; the situation in which the common man is the ruler. Another is the radicalism of social gospel theology, which was accentuated by the failure of orthodox theology to meet changing social needs. A third is the inconclusiveness of theology's answer to the slavery question.

This situation aggravated the anti-intellectualism fostered by the revivals. Many intellectuals were lost to the church, and those who remained in it often did so by a sort of splitting of their personalities. Much intellectualism was openly criticized by the church. While it must be admitted that many things advanced in the name of reason and science were subversive of true religion, it must also be pointed out that the church's attitude tended to drive intellectual pursuits even farther away from its position; and no concerted and respectable effort was made to show the essential reasonableness of the Christian position.

* * *

It is in point, I think, to suggest that in our answer to the intellectual problem we have tended to align ourselves with Fundamentalism. The Scriptural position of Fundamentalism may be relatively sound, but the intellectual respectability of much of Fundamentalism is not on a high level. We may not and cannot be satisfied with it. Nor is it conceivable that we shall have an influence on American intellectual circles unless we do better intellectually than Fundamentalism has done.

At the same time we must acknowledge that much of our vaunted intellectual superiority to Fundamentalism has been mere abstract theory without much actual production. We have criticized what others have had to offer in the way of theology. But we have had nothing new to offer in its place. More serious still, even our criticisms have not been well made, penetrating or of such a character as to attract much attention. Perhaps the old theology is sufficient, without any new statements. But at least its application to the movements and developments of the day ought to be consistently and effectively made.

In this failure, blame has been placed, and with some justification, on the theological and other leaders who have not produced the scholarly works which might have been expected of them. I should like at this time, however, to mention another aspect of this problem which is often overlooked. It is that our people have demanded of their leaders that they should not lead very aggressively, but rather that they should be good followers of a somewhat blind and static public opinion.

The least we can do is to create the climate in which scholarly effort will be encouraged. We must, for example, not listen to public whisper campaigns about this man or that, but let his views stand or fall on the basis of their examination by those competent to discuss the matter. This, let it be said, would not be a betrayal of those loyal people who pour their money into Calvin College and Seminary. It would be precisely the kind of service they are

aying for, whether they realize it or ot. It is evident, I think, that the enator who really serves his country the one who legislates more wisely an the simple demands of his conituency decree. As demoncracy must il without such statesmanship, so region will suffer without real leaderhip.

Such liberty is especially desirable ecause the task is so great. Having ound the liberals, the fundamentalists, nd the neo-orthodox unsatisfactory in heir answers, we must set ourselves to evise our own answer to the intellecual problem. In a sense we share the ffects of the divorce between faith and eason. Yet this sharing is peculiarly epresented in us. Our seminary is one f the few in which the old theological rriculum is preserved almost intact. may be that a disillusioned world will e more ready to listen to us than they ave been for some generations past. ut the point is that if the world is eady to listen, we must be ready to peak.

### IV Competition Between Denominations

ONLY brief mention can be ade of the final formative influence, ompetition between denominations. his was part of the basic theory as to hat should happen under conditions f freedom of religion. The competion took various forms. "Evangelials" and "unevangelicals" were aligned gainst each other as early as 1844; nd all Protestants could be united by he threat of rising Catholic power. ut eventually each denomination stood y and for itself.

While ninety per cent of the populaion were yet to be won for the Chrisian faith, the evil aspects of this compeition could be comfortably overlooked. ut as the percentage of population ominally related to some church inreased, competition came to involve ore and more of a denial of the posion of some other group. With the decline of interest in theology, the ompetition came to be on the basis f race, national derivation, social tanding, or something so simple as he proximity of a church building.

Our place in this pattern is as complicated as it is with respect to the other influences mentioned. We compete with others for the attention and allegiance of men already associated with some church. But while non-theological differences have become the basis of competition for others, we are still trying to compete on the basis of doctrinal distinctiveness and to put aside the exclusively Dutch character which has thus far stamped our church.

Our perplexity is made the greater because we find that those who have the same national and creedal background as we — those, that is, who ought to agree with us theologically — are not always aware of the importance of theological considerations. Thus the Reformed Church in America cooperates on the one hand with the National Council of Churches, and possesses on the other hand an ardent fundamentalist wing. But the theological emphasis and distinctiveness which we seek does not seem to be generally sought among them.

* * *

WITHOUT further elaboration, enough has been said to indicate something of the peculiarity of our position in the American environment. We live in an environment in which other churches, similar in background to ours, have undergone great changes. The forces which have brought about those changes in the case of others have been at work on us, too; but not as acutely in many respects on us as on others. We find, then, many points of difference with our environment, points in which we remain closer than the average American denomination to our European Reformed heritage. But there are points also at which we are far more "Americanized" than we were a generation ago, and this applies not alone to the language we use.

More confusing still, neither the element of heritage nor that of environment can be evaluated as simply good or bad. Our differences from American churches in general are in some cases precious points of distinctiveness which we would not lose for the world. But they are also stumbling blocks in the way of real communication. Our similarities to the American environment, growing in degree, are beckoning opportunities to us to take our place effectively in the American religious scene. But they threaten us with an old bugbear; loss of that precious truth which is the faith itself to us and which we feel America needs.

Nor does it seem that we have yet shown the ability to determine in what respects we must hasten the adjustment and in what respect we must hold the line or even roll it back. Or at least it seems that if we have discovered those things in theory, we have not discovered how to put them into practice. We have not yet analyzed our environment sharply enough to come to a unified agreement that what works in Europe will not necessarily work here. We tend to take something adopted as a point of expediency in Europe and exalt it to a principle, which must be applied regardless of consequences. We may, if we wish, foredoom ourselves to futility in that way; but it is a question whether this is a realistic understanding of our duty to the faith. Better, it would seem, to re-study the principles and apply them as expediently as possible.

This is the audience to which we speak; this is the air we breathe; this is the background against which we work. If these considerations have opened our eyes to one small fraction of the complexity and significance of our situation, they have accomplished their purpose.


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# Remember the Sabbath Day

by JOHN VRIEND

In last month's *Journal* I suggested why the Sabbath is and remains a day reserved for celebration. I should like now to approach the Sabbath from a fresh angle, and to consider first the teaching of Jesus on the subject. Our Lord, in his numerous conflicts over the Sabbath with his contemporaries, left us a number of highly important directives. At his feet we can learn a lot about the meaning of the Sabbath.

### Jesus and the Sabbath

In paging through the gospels we note that Jesus performed many miracles on the Sabbath in a context of pharisaic suspicion and hatred. Teaching in the synagogue, he heals the man with an unclean spirit. Coming to Peter's house from the synagogue, he heals Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:21-31). On another occasion, Jesus heals a woman with "a spirit of infirmity." The officiating minister in the synagogue, not daring to address his criticism directly to Christ, snaps at the crowd that they have all week to come and be healed — why come on the Sabbath? Christ replies: You hypocrites, don't you help even an animal when it is in trouble on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17)? One Sabbath morning, when all the Pharisees were watching from around street-corners and not a leaf on a tree dared to rustle, Jesus walked down to the pool of Bethesda. Upon arrival he heals a man who had been a patient for thirty-eight years. The immediate result is a conflict with the Jews. He explains that Sabbath rest does not mean inaction, for "my Father worketh even until now, and I work." At this, the Jews explode. Here, in a nutshell, Jesus has stated all that is unbearable about him to Jewish feeling. He violates their Unitarian sensibilities by an assumption of equality with God and their Sabbattarian sensibilities by working on the Sabbath (John 5:9-18).

And then there is the well-known grainfield episode recorded by three out of four evangelists. When the disciples walk through the grainfields and help themselves to a few heads of grain, the Pharisees accuse them of violating the anti-harvest law applied on the Sabbath. This violation concerned but one of the thirty-nine main categories of forbidden activities the Mishnah (part of the Talmud) lists, but the Pharisees took it very seriously. It was on this occasion that Jesus concluded the argument by saying: "The sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath: so that the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath" (Mark 2:27, 28).

In view of the above we shall pay particular attention to three things about Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath. First, he declares that the sabbath was established for man. It was a divine provision, ante-dating the Jewish economy, given not to impoverish man but to enrich him by God's nearness and to keep the perspectives of time open. The original idea was not at all that God loved to see man unemployed but that God wanted man for himself. This statement obviously undercuts the fiendish pharisaic concern for the institution stripped of its true purpose. Second, he declares himself the Lord of the sabbath. He was with God in the beginning and co-ordained this institution. Not the Pharisees but he was an authority on the true nature of the Sabbath. Now it was to follow him that the disciples had left their occupations and source of income. It was to follow him that they were compelled to eat raw grain in the field. But since this activity enabled them to follow Christ was it not fully justified? Jesus then, by his reference to David and his men eating the showbread in the temple, cogently proves that the ceremonial must subserve the moral, that the Sabbath must subserve the purpose of enabling men to follow their Master. By ascribing authority over the Sabbath to himself, the Saviour undercuts the squeemish and perverted authority the Pharisees had ascribed to themselves. Third, he demonstrates the true meaning of the Sabbath by missions of mercy. By these actions, he rejects the mere negation of labor as the true purpose of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is to detach men from the habit of working at their own selfish programs and to free them for God and for their fellowmen. The Sabbath is not to be poor in activity but rich in the revelation of love shown to God and fellow creatures. It was this that Jewish formalism had obscured; for this rea son, undoubtedly, Jesus performed s many miracles on the Sabbath. It wa to unmask a loveless cessation fro work as being contrary to the purpos for which God ordained the Sabbath.

### Paul and the Sabbath

In discussions on the Sunda Paul is frequently quoted as having n interest in the continuance of a specia day of rest. We are compelled there fore to look briefly into the dispute texts. They are three in number.

"One man esteems the one day abov another: another esteemeth every da alike. Let each man be fully assure in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5, 6) These words occur in a passage on th "weak brother." The issue on whic some discussion had arisen was a for of asceticism practiced by certai "vegetarians," men reluctant to touc meat, who set store by particular day Paul does not condemn this practic as he does the conduct of Judaizin Christians, but warns against criticis of others who have no particular pre erence for certain days on the calenda His advice: Let us be charitable in matter so innocent. It is not evide why this passage should be interpret to mean that Paul favored the inclusio of the fourth commandment amon things indifferent.

"Ye observe days, and months . . (Gal. 4:10). Here Paul clearly direc his polemic, not against a Christian o servance of the first day of the wee but against a threatening lapse into t whole system of Jewish observances.

"Let no man . . . judge you . . . respect of . . . a new moon or a Sa bath day: which are a shadow of t things to come; but the body is Christ (Col. 2:16, 17). Again Paul oppos an anachronistic concern for the main nance of Jewish institutions and foc ses all attention on the reality whi has rendered the shadows obsolete. none of these passages is there a cle cut reference to the first day of t week celebrated by Christians. seems warranted, then, to dismiss t charge that Paul's attitude to the fou commandment is one of neutrality.

*See also A. Kuyper, *Tractaat van de S bath,* proposition XXVIII.

The question arises whether we can-)t make a good case for saying that aul's attitude was definitely positive. think we can. From his first epistle the Corinthians (16:2) we may infer )th that he honored the day and that saw its significance for the church. The fact that Paul speaks of the first ay of the week and calls that the day r the collection implies that Sunday as destined for the special service of e Lord."** A collection was a big ing for Paul. In his second epistle to e same church he devotes two whole apters (eight and nine) to this mat- r of Sunday giving. No one has more autifully than he stated its meaning: For the ministration of this service )t only filleth up the measure of the ants of the saints, but aboundeth also rough many thanksgivings unto God" 9:12). It is this service, so fully in armony with the spiritual celebration manded in the fourth commandment, hich Paul prescribes for the first day the week. Paul certainly leaves the ay wide open for a varied program at his attitude toward it implies a ady endorsement and a grateful use it.

### The Sabbath and We

SERMONS on the Sabbath in our rcles are generally controlled by the Reformation understanding of the fourth commandment found in Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism. This Lord's Day has two parts: there is an insistence, first, on maintaining the ministry of the gospel — also by seeing to it that the schools continue to operate fruitfully — and, second, on living out of the new life which Pentecost has brought. This statement, which strongly reflects Calvin's emphases, limits itself to Sunday worship and the Christian life. As a description of the central significance of the sabbath it is certainly to the point. Perhaps it has all that can with any confidence be said about the Sabbath; but I cannot help wondering whether the Lord's Day is not just a bit richer, has not just a few more uses, than we find indicated here. As far as our neighbor is concerned, the one to whom Jesus devoted so much of his time on the Sabbath, he does not come into view here except — the alms! — through institutional channels. Nor is there any mention of the Resurrection as the swivel on which our celebration on the first day of the week turns.

A big problem for many people is the maintenance of some decorum during the many Sunday hours in which we do not attend church. Now if there is anything we should shun in this connection it is the picayunish bickering over what may and what may not be done on Sunday. Formalists from Jesus' day to our day have tortured themselves and others over this question and have failed to enter into the joy of our Lord over his finished works. But for us it is not enough to shake off the spirit of hair-splitting triviality. If style in Christian living is important, then detail, too, is important. We shall, I think, get further, at least personally, if we continue to ask whether a given project adds to, or detracts from, our ability to celebrate with all the saints the completed works of God.

For the purpose of the Lord's Day is not to magnify inaction but to be a training-school in which, released from our daily absorptions, we may exercise ourselves in magnifying God and loving our neighbor. An active commitment to the ever-active Lord of creation and redemption, and hence an active commitment to the welfare of our fellowmen, not closing one's eyes to the splendor of the country-side or banishing the click of knitting needles from our living rooms, is the point of the fourth commandment. Interpreted negatively this imperative loses its X-raying function upon the human heart and becomes a mere encumbrance. Interpreted positively it is an avenue to blessedness.

* F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on First orinthians.*

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### ON CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

"I pray you again, Madame, not to well any longer on that distinction hich deceives you, while you imagine at it was permitted under the law to venge one's self, because it is there id, 'an eye for an eye.' For venance was as much forbidden then as is under the gospel, seeing that we are ommanded to do good even to the east of our enemy. But what was addressed to the judges each individual pplied to himself. There remains the buse of the precept which our Lord esus Christ corrects.

"Be that as it will, we are all agreed, hat in order to be recognized as children of God, it behoves us to conform urselves to his example, striving to lo good to those who are unworthy of t, just as he causes his sun to shine n the evil and the good.

"Thus hatred and Christianity are hings incompatible. I mean hatred towards persons — in opposition to the ove we owe them. On the contrary we are to wish and even procure their good; and to labour, as much as in us lies, to maintain peace and concord with all men.

"Now if those who are commissioned to dissipate all enmity and rancour, to reconcile enemies, to exhort to patience, and repress all lust of vengeance, be themselves brands of discord — so much the worse, and so much the less are they to be excused."

JOHN CALVIN — Letter DCLXIV,
To the Duchess of Ferrara, Geneva,
24 January 1564

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". . . what the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world. The soul is distributed in every member of the body, and Christians are scattered in every city in the world. The soul dwells in the body, and yet it is not of the body. So, Christians live in the world, but they are not of the world. The soul which is guarded in the visible body is not itself visible. And so, Christians who are in the world are known, but their worship remains unseen. The flesh hates the soul and acts like an unjust aggressor, because it is forbidden to indulge in pleasures. The world hates Christians — not that they have done it wrong, but because they oppose its pleasures. The soul loves the body and its members in spite of the hatred. So Christians love those who hate them. The soul is locked up in the body, yet it holds the body together. And so Christians are held in the world as in a prison, yet it is they who hold the world together. The immortal soul dwells in a mortal tabernacle. So Christians sojourn among perishable things, but their souls are set on immortality in heaven. When the soul is ill-treated in the matter of food and drink, it is improved. So, when Christians are persecuted, their numbers daily increase. Such is the assignment to which God has called them, and they have no right to shirk it." —A Second Century Christian
in a *Letter to Diognetus*
Quoted from Beach and Niebuhr,
*Christian Ethics* p. 69

# Why We Have No University

by W. HARRY JELLEMA*

AMONG Christian Reformed people the need of a Calvinistic university has been recognized for at least fifty years.*

Not every individual member of the denomination, of course, was convinced of the need; nor today is. Nonetheless, during these fifty-odd years, consciousness of the need was never absent, nor did the ideal ever lack able advocates. Why then in all this time did those who from conviction were enthusiastic supporters of the ideal not succeed in taking even the first steps toward its realization? The question becomes the more provocative when one considers that during the same span, and despite equal indifference on the part of many individuals, educational ideals were realized on the level of grammar school, high school, college, and theological seminary. Why then not also on the level of university?

The reason, I think, lies chiefly in the operation on the denominational mind of two factors. The operation of the one is quite evident from the record; that of the other, though far more significant, is not.

* * *

Before taking actual steps toward realization of their ideal, those who were convinced of the need of a university had of course to answer certain major questions of principle and practicability as relating to Christian institutions of higher learning. But, as would appear from the record, attempt at answer seemed always to end in a dilemma, in a dilemma that paralyzed action.

As applying to the establishment of a university, these major questions can be brought together into one: should and can a Calvinistic university be "free"? ("free," that is to say, from the instituted church). On the one hand, establishing schools and granting advanced degrees and engaging in purely scientific study would not seem properly the business of the church; so then a university *should*, even as a matter simply of ecclesiastical principle, be "free." On the other hand, without church subsidy how can the expense of a Christian university be met? and if, for financial and practical reasons, the church does subsidize, will it not also wish to control the academic life of the institution? else how will the church assure itself that the institution is really Reformed? So then the university *can not* be "free." In short, there seemed no escaping the dilemma: Either let the church establish and control the institution, but thus violate ecclesiastical and academic principle; or else stand by the principle of a "free" university, but then recognize that its establishment becomes practically impossible.

Increasingly during the half century it became a settled conviction that serious thought and talk of a university would have inevitably to center around and always end up with this paralyzing dilemma.

* * *

BUT deep down the reason why, despite expressed conviction of the need of it, no Calvin University materialized lies not in the fact of this apparent dilemma. That establishment of a university involves grave and difficult questions, no one will be disposed to deny; but that every attempt to deal with these must bog down in dilemma, is nonsense. The dilemma is neither real nor final. And that it was able to cast its hypnotic spell for so long a time over the minds of serious men with high Calvinistic ideals is inexplicable except for the concomitant operation of another factor.

This second factor is not directly obvious from the record. Indeed it was not at all the product of deliberation and reflection. It simply grew as a tacit assumption, and gained its strength unobserved and unexamined. And yet except for the unobserved growth and operation of this assumption, the spell cast by the apparent dilemma would not have lasted, and we might now have had the beginnings of a university.

One can readily understand why the assumption should have gained general acceptance. In substance it is no more than a definition of university. And, in all fairness, the definition will to any one of us seem wholly natural, and so obvious as to require no further examination. For, according to the assumption, a university is merely an institution for granting higher degrees and for preparing men professionally; it exists only for the sake of students who may wish to continue their studies beyond college. And this does represent the popular contemporary notion of university.

Nonetheless, however innocently we may have assumed this definition, to assume it is also inescapably to accept its corollaries. And one immediate consequence is, as already intimated, to add overwhelming vigor to the old dilemma. If a university is essentially the kind of institution connoted by our assumption, if its defining purpose is to turn out dentists and lawyers and engineers and to grant advanced degrees in a wide variety of fields, then the required financial outlays become prohibitive. While we may still express belief in the ideal of a Christian university, we seem forced to postpone its establishment indefinitely.

But to take this definition for granted is not only to add appalling strength to the old dilemma. There is a second consequence, perhaps even more deadly. Since a university is by assumption only the top rung of an educational ladder that begins with kindergarten, establishing of a university can, and indeed should, wait the completion of the intermediate rungs. Christian grammar schools, high schools, junior col-

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* Some who with me were just beginning Prep School in the early 1900's may recall a "Corps" address by the late Reverend M. Van Vessem, in the conclusion of which he expressed the anticipated imminence of Calvin University. Already in those days the theme was not uncommon.

ges, senior colleges — till these are erfected we not only may but ought ostpone consideration of a university. he argument is familiar. And it is ersuasive; that is to say, if one grants e premise.

Of all the consequences of the asmed definition, however, the deadlist is still another: the change unonsciously effected in the reason why university is considered necessary.

Obviously, why and even whether one ants a university depends on one's efinition of university. At the beinning of the half century our notion as not without haziness, but it did nclude the essentials. At the end, our otion is clear, but false. Or, if, at rst hearing, such language seems too brupt, let us say that the definition which has among us acquired the tatus of unquestioned assumption is t very best only a poor half-truth. And, n consequence, at the end of fifty ears we have a much poorer reason or believing we need a university than ve had at the beginning.

* * *

WHAT is a university?

A university is not merely, nor is it even first of all, an institution for granting higher degrees; it does not exist for the sake of students who may wish to continue their studies beyond college. Rather, a university exists for the sake of science, for the prosecution of scholarly knowledge ("het beoefenen der wetenschap"), to the glory of God and to the welfare of the community by which it is established. Only if a community feels an obligation to cultivate scholarly knowledge, "wetenschap," can it establish an institution that will be a university.

It follows that essentially a university may be defined as a group of scholars existing corporately in order, on behalf of the sustaining community, to engage in scholarly activity.*

It follows also that unless this corporate group is constantly and progressively active in the business of scholarship and study and first-hand research and interpretation, there simply is no university.

Secondarily the work of this corporation of scholars is to educate others in the business of being a scholar; is to produce scholars. But even in this aspect, unless the teaching is geared wholly to the turning out of graduates of whom it can be said objectively that they are capable of independent scholarly activity and judgment, the teaching is not university teaching; and, again, there is no university. By way of caricaturing contrast, suppose a staff of men each possessing an earned doctoral degree, each therefore a man who once learned the elements of his specialty, but what he has learned long since has grown cold. Suppose each now cutting it into portions of convenient size, and presenting these in lectures or "discussions" or "seminars"; — that would *not* be university teaching. In university teaching the material must be still friction-hot from a mind wrestling with contemporary issues; hot enough to start the student's mental blood circulating.

And only in the third place is a university the top rung of the "ladder of schools." Indeed, to assign third place to this function is hardly calculated to indicate its actual remoteness from the essential nature of a university. Let me therefore employ extreme language: An institution could be a going university even though it had no "students" in the usual sense.

Of course I do not mean to separate the functions of a university; to split them asunder as with a hatchet. I do mean, however, to underscore the woefully mistaken character of our current assumption as to what makes a university.

And of course I do not mean that a university, since its primary obligation is to science, to "wetenschap," is to be an ivory tower. Quite the opposite. Actually, a university is one way of ensuring that the members of the sustaining community shall not themselves each live in his ivory tower.

WHY do we want a university? Is it ultimately only in order that a (comparatively) few of our youth may receive their advanced degrees from a Christian institution? This, as I intimated earlier, is but a poor half-reason.

Rather, we believe we need a university because as Reformed community we have an obligation to cultivate science, "wetenschap," to the glory of God; we need a university because we have a duty to keep Calvinistic scholarship continuously relevant; we need a university because we are obliged to invest our spiritual capital and set it to work, lest, while we in our generation live on (and in the process consume) it, we have less to bequeath to our children than we received; we need a university not simply as top rung but in order that we may build the ladder; may build a system of Christian schools, kindergarten through and beyond college, that will be Christian. Such is the real reason why we want a university.

And that even after fifty years we have not yet the real beginnings of a university is, I think, in the last analysis because we gradually and unwittingly changed our reason for wanting one, in the process of gradually and unwittingly accepting a false assumption as to its nature.

I do not think it is because we no longer believe, as did our fathers, that a Reformed community has the obligation progressively to cultivate Christian scholarship.

* * *

BUT can we have a university? If we persist in assuming the poor half-definition of a university, and thus condemn ourselves to a poor half-reason for wanting one, a university is a sheer impossibility.

If we are agreed on the real reason why we need a university, we should no longer postpone its realization. Nor need we. The first steps toward a real university can be taken at once.

In a later article or two I hope to submit some concrete suggestions.

* Such a group is properly a "university" because corporately it concerns itself with the whole "universe" of knowledge; and each scholar, while he is a naturalized citizen of some particular field, is (ideally) no alien in any.

# Religion in Science

by HENRY STOB

WHEN a man asks how religious faith is related to science, how belief in God affects knowledge of created things, he is apt, I have been contending, to get any one of three popular answers to his question.

He may be told — by a Dichotomist — that religious faith is significantly related to some sciences (the sciences of Man) and related not at all to other sciences (the sciences of Things). On the other hand he may be told — this time by a Rationalist — that religious faith sustains no justifiable relation to any science whatsoever, since science in the whole of its domain is constituted by nothing else than reason and experience operating apart from any ultimate commitment. Finally he may be told — by a Fideist who repudiates both rationalism and dichotomism — that religious faith is related to every one of the various sciences, since all human experience is the experience of a being who is religious at the core, and since all thought is governed by presuppositions of so basic a nature as to be properly denominated religious.

These, as anyone can see, are very different answers to a single question. The Dichotomist believes that *some* of the sciences stand under the influence of religion and *some* of them do not. The Rationalist believes that *none* of them do. The Fideist believes that *all* of them do. The Dichotomist believes that some sciences articulate the antithesis, and that others, regarded as in their very nature neutral or common, do not. The Rationalist believes that every science is neutral and that the antithesis either does not exist or is without significance for reason. The Fideist holds that the antithesis runs straight through all the sciences, and that a decision for or against Christ is made even in Arithmetic.

In earlier articles of this series I indicated, if only in passing, why, in my judgment, a Reformed student of Christian truth can not rest in the position taken by the Dichotomist and the Rationalist. It remains now to consider whether such a student is obliged to adopt, as the only other possibility, the view I have chosen to call Fideism.

* * *

THE central affirmation of the Fideist is one which strikes directly and with maximum force against the rationalist position. It is a clear and radical affirmation, and one that cannot be successfully controverted. It is this: There is no such thing as a "pure," an "uncommitted," an "autonomous" reason. Reason is a servant of the heart. It is always under the governance of some accepted value, or more deeply, it is always a function of a person who in the depths of his being has made a religious decision, that is, a decision as to what is Ultimate, who is God. Whenever a man thinks theoretically his thinking is "controlled" by answers he has already given to questions — even though unformulated — concerning the Origin and Unity of the cosmos, and concerning the interrelation of its parts. All philosophy is based upon a non-theoretical, apriori commitment, upon a personal evaluation of what in all the universe is most crucially significant. All philosophizing is done within the perspective of some faith which determines the central category in terms of which the world is interpreted and construed, and which defines what each philosopher understands by rationality.

Support for this thesis is provided by the Biblical teaching that out of the heart are the issues of life, and proof for it is found in every analysis which goes beyond the surface aspects of the knowing process. Intimations of the truth of the thesis are found in the differences that may be observed to exist between reasonable and thoughtful men on the more important issues in philosophy. "It is a fact generally known," says Professor Dooyeweerd, "that the student who sets himself to study the history of philosophy finds himself much embarrassed . . . because he must observe profound disagreement between the different schools even with regard to the most fundamental principles of philosophy. In this situation the most embarrassing point is that the different schools . . . all profess to be founded on purely theoretical and scientific principles. . . . Now, if that were true, it seems a little astonishing that they cannot succeed in convincing one another by purely scientific arguments. . . . That prompts us to raise the question whether theoretical principles are the true starting point of these schools. Is it not possible that the latter is hidden beneath supposedly scientific theses, and that scientific thought has deeper roots . . .?" (*Transcendental Problems of Philosophic Thought*, pp. 16-17).

The answer is, of course, that scientific thought does have deeper roots, as Professor Dooyeweerd has amply shown in his monumental *Critique of Theoretical Thought*. The only way to account for the deep differences between thoughtful men is to recognize that the decisive factor in our thought life is not our exercise of reason but rather what we take and trust as significant for reason, what first and material premiss we allow to govern our reason, what definitive apriori controls our reason. The opposition between Christian and non-Christian philosophy, accordingly, is not an opposition between faith and reason, but an opposition between rival faiths controlling reason. As Abraham Kuyper once said: "Not faith and science . . . but two scientific systems . . . are opposed to each other, each having its own faith . . . We have to do with two absolute forms of sciences, both of which claim the whole domain of human knowledge, and both of which have a suggestion about the supreme Being of their own as the point of departure for their world-view" (*Calvinism*, p. 176).

* * *

This insight into the knowledge situation is not limited to Dutch or even to Reformed scholars. It is possessed by thinkers of various schools, and is widely articulated in contemporary philosophical literature. Edward Ramsdell declares: "Only as we recognize the influence of presuppositions of significance upon analyses of mind and value do we find the differences among the historic schools intelligible. Funda-

mentally those differences are not in method but in perspective" (*The Christian Perspective*, p. 25). Roger Hazelton observes: "We do our believing, like our seeing, always within perspectives . . . Each view of the world to which our believing points is . . . framed and focused . . . What I am able to acknowledge and accept depends decidedly on where I take my stand. So true is this that we had better frankly recognize and confess our perspectives, rather than pretend to some impartial, neutral viewpoint which none of us can possibly possess" (*Renewing the Mind*, p. 56). Alan Richardson says: "It is becoming clearer nowadays that without the introduction of a 'faith-principle' no metaphysical system . . . can be constructed . . . Every philosophical system must employ a principle of selection, a value-judgment . . . An act of faith is prior to the construction of a metaphysic or to the acceptance of a philosophy of life" (*Christian Apologetics*, p. 35-36). John Baillie states: "The determining factor in the formation of philosophical systems has again and again been the initial presence or absence of religious faith in the philosopher's heart" (*The Interpretation of Religion*, p. 38). And Reinhold Niebuhr declares: "Bertrand Russell's indictment of metaphysics as covert theology remains true even if the modern metaphysician seeks to dispense with religious presuppositions and to act as a coordinator of the sciences. He cannot relate all the detailed facts revealed by science into a total scheme of coherence without presuppositions which are not suggested by the scientific description of the facts, but which are consciously or unconsciously introduced by a religiously grounded world-view" (*An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p. 13).

It may be taken as settled, then, that the Fideist is right when he affirms that all conceiving, judging, reasoning is done within a framework determined by an apriori choice of perspective; that a world view is necessarily taken from some *point*, which point is *chosen* before the philosophical task begins; that there is an inescapable "subjective" factor in every theoretical construction; that "a person's interpretation of the facts, so far as their ultimate meaning is concerned, does not depend upon his mere looking at them . . . (but) . . . rather upon the point of view from which he looks at them" (Ramsdell, *The Christian Perspective*, p. 23); and that there are, deep down, but two kinds of men, regenerate and unregenerate, who "face the cosmos from different points of view and are impelled by different impulses," occasioning of necessity "the fact of two kinds of human life and consciousness of life, and of two kinds of science" (A. Kuyper, *Encyclopedia*, p. 154).

* * *

If the Fideist is right in his central affirmation, if behind every exercise of reason is a commitment for or against God as he is revealed in Christ, is the problem we have been considering not thereby solved? We have been asking whether we can properly speak of a Christian Physics, a Christian Mathematics, a Christian Logic. If we grant, as we must, that all thought is faith-conditioned, and that basically there are but two kinds of faith, Christian and non-Christian, is there any escaping the conclusion that there is or can be a Christian Physics, Mathematics, Logic?

There is, I suggest, no escaping the conclusion. The question is settled. There is, or can be, a Christian natural science, as there is, or can be, a non-Christian natural science. This statement, however, needs to be carefully qualified. Qualifications are necessary because without them the Fideist is likely either to be grossly misunderstood or to be betrayed by his own thesis into talking nonsense.

It is of the utmost importance to observe, for example, that narrowly scientific thought — thought in the realm of the natural and formal sciences — is never directly, but always and only indirectly influenced by the religious commitment of the heart. It is influenced only through Philosophy, which is the true and "proper" locus of the antithesis in the realm of theoretical activity. This is to say that a natural or formal science, or indeed any particular science, can be Christian (or non-Christian) only in so far as, within it, decisions have to be made on matters of philosophic import. Such decisions have to be made, it is true, within all the particular sciences, but, since these decisions are invariably made at the deepest level of the science, at the point where it borders or impinges on Philosophy itself, the effects of these decisions are not immediately, nor always clearly, registered on the surface of these sciences. We find, in consequence, that Christian sciences — particularly Christian natural and formal sciences — do not differ perceptibly on the surface level from the sciences elaborated by non-Christians.

There are additional or allied reasons for this. The first is that decisions made within the particular science on matters of philosophical import do not, as such, alter or affect the data with which the science has to deal. There are no Christian or non-Christian *facts*. In Mathematics, for example, the number system, the order and the value of the digits, the relations that exist between them, and the ways in which they can be manipulated, can be determined by any investigator in the field regardless of his religious commitment, and when determined, can be held in common by each and all. There is no Christian (or non-Christian) multiplication table.

The second reason why Christian natural sciences frequently differ so little from those elaborated by non-Christians lies in the fact that even when questions of philosophic import arise within these sciences the distinctively Christian answer to these questions is very hard to determine. Consider Mathematics again. It is plain that a Christian Mathematician, working on the deeper levels of his science, will have to raise and answer the sort of questions on which Hilbert, Brouwer, Lobachevsky, Dedekind, Whitehead, Russell, and others are divided. He will have to answer questions such as Professor Dooyeweerd formulated in these words: "Is it permissible (with Dedekind) to include the original spatial continuity-moments and dimensionality-moments in our concept of Number? Is Mathematics simply axiomatical symbolic logic? Does the 'transfinite number' really possess numerical meaning? Is it justified to conceive of space as a continuum of points?" (*A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Vol. I, p. 549). In the

measure that the mathematician can supply *Christian* answers to these and similar questions, answers dictated by an authentically Christian philosophy, in that measure he may no doubt be said to have elaborated a Christian Mathematics. But it is obvious that the Christian answers to these questions are not easy to determine and that, when determined, their truly Christian character would be hard to verify and establish.

* * *

It appears then that a Christian formal science, or a Christian science of nature, is theoretically possible, and that it is a mistake to deny, as the Dichotomist does, that faith, through philosophy, can penetrate the sciences of things and relations. On the other hand, it is no less a mistake to suppose that a Christian Mathematics or a Christian Physics is something perfectly intelligible and identifiable. It is only as one moves up the scale of the sciences and gets into those concerned with man and his values that the Christian meaning clearly and unequivocally appears.

# LETTERS TO THE JOURNAL

### LOOKING AT BOTH SIDES

In his article, HERE IS THY POUND, (*Ref. Journal*, July-August, 1955, p. 3), Dr. Harry Boer says, "We are very little concerned about the *quantities* of converts that enter the Church, but very much concerned about the *quality* of the relatively few that do. . . . What does Acts say about the quality-quantity contrast? Strangely enough, it does not say very much about the quality-concept, but it just bubbles over with the idea of *quantity*."

The writer then devotes almost a column to instances of this quantity emphasis. (Acts has no case of quality-quantity *contrast*!) We submit that it will be well, in this connection, to consider also the emphasis on *quality* in Acts.

When Pentecost saw three thousand converted, they were first "*pricked in their heart*," then led to "*repent*." Then they continued stedfastly in the teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and the prayers; selling their possessions, parting their goods, and praising God (Acts 2:37, 42f). Isn't the narrative aglow with spiritual quality?

A little later the number of converts is five thousand men for "many that heard the word *believed*" (4:4) and the high grade of their Christian life is shown"; all *filled with the Holy Spirit*, and they *spake the word of God with boldness*" (31).

Consider the revival in Samaria: "The multitudes *gave heed with one accord* unto the things that were spoken by Philip" (8:6) and then when Peter and John came, they "prayed for them, that they might *receive the Holy Spirit*" (8:16). Is not quality strongly to the fore?

In the epoch-making happenings in the house of Cornelius, first came the *receiving of the word*, then the *giving of the Spirit*; an emphasis on spiritual quality.

When Peter wants to put his finger on the central qualification of the converts from the Gentiles he says that God "bare them witness, *giving them the Holy Spirit . . . cleansing their hearts by faith*" (15:8f).

When Paul briefly sums up his message he tells us he went about "testifying both to Jews and to Greeks *repentance toward God*, and *faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*" (20:21).

Do not both of these strongly accentuate spiritual qualifications?

A striking expression occurs, with variations, at three significant times in Acts: "The word of God increased," "the word of God grew and multiplied," "so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (6:7, 12:24, 19:20). Is not quality significantly stressed by such Gospel-impact and Gospel-consciousness?

More passages could be adduced but may these suffice here.

Dr. Boer writes (last column, page 4); "Nowhere do we read, however, that it were better for the 'poor quality' converts to get out of the Church, or that they should not be taken into the Church." But did not God *take* Ananias and Sapphira out of the church and did not Paul say; "Put away the wicked man from among yourselves" (I Cor. 5:13)? Did not Peter say to Simon, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for thy heart is not right before God" (Acts 8:21)?

The article in question goes on to say, "Just what is an 'acceptable' convert, anyway? I venture to say there is no such animal. Who are we, to whose account so much sin stands charged, to distinguish between desirable and undesirable members of the Church?"

But must not the Church give careful heed to the quality of its prospective members? Why does our Confession (Art. 29) set forth the marks of the true Church and true believers? Why must our consistories carefully pass on those who come to make confession of faith?

It is welcome to have the writer point us to the example of the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church, saying; "It believes in a doctrinal and disciplined Christianity." That, we take it, means what we might call a "quality" membership. May that example challenge us! Not to less emphasis on quality but to greater emphasis on zeal!

(Rev.) C. Holtrop

Terra Ceia, N. C.

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### Comment

The quality of which the Rev. Holtrop speaks and the "quality" of which I spoke in my article are obviously not the same. I *fully honor* the quality which the Rev. Holtrop has in mind, and I believe that my article plainly reflects this.

The question at issue is this: When a person has been qualified by faith in Christ to be received by Him, may we establish *added* standards of "quality" to determine whether or not he may be a member of the Christian Reformed Church? I believe that the Rev. Holtrop will look in vain for *that* kind of "quality" in the New Testament.

H. R. B.

Dear Sirs:

The articles of Dr. Harry Boer are invariably provocative as well as instructive. For that reason I always read them eagerly. No doubt many of the readers of the *Reformed Journal* feel as I do that the understanding of the missionary task of the church has been deepened appreciably by his numerous contributions on this subject.

But just because these articles are provocative and significant, it is to be expected that they will draw comment and even some adverse reaction.

I am provoked by Boer's contribution in the July-August issue entitled "Here is thy pound" to write this letter. In this article Boer contrasts the "quality" membership of the Christian Reformed Church with the "quantity" membership of the New Testament church. It strikes me that he has pointed up a significant disparity between our church today and the church of the day of the Apostles. He is dealing here with the *conception* of the church, of church membership and of the standards for entrance into the church. He challenges our right "to distinguish between desirable and undesirable members of the church." The New Testament, he states, must be normative for our missionary *thinking, attitudes,* and *approach.*

What specifically provokes me to write is the title "Here is thy pound." This phrase — taken from the parable of Jesus which is recorded in Luke 19 — is repeated at the very end of Boer's article. The inference must be drawn that the thinking, attitude and approach of the Christian Reformed Church has to some extent made her like the wicked servant of the parable who laid up his pound in a napkin, and made accusation to his Lord of being an austere and unjust man: "thou takest up what thou layest not down, and reapest what thou didst not sow" (Luke 19:21). The sin of the wicked servant is that he made no good use of his pound. Worse than that, he so handled the matter that his Lord would not even get the interest from the bank. To top it off, he sought to justify his evil actions by calling attention to the (supposed) sins of his Lord. With self-righteous vigor he said to his Lord: "Here is thy pound."

Dr. Boer comments upon the Christian Reformed Church by saying: "Our gains have been little, but we kept the standards high. Barring exceptions, we did not feel that full-blooded Americans could be made blue-blooded Church members. Here is thy pound."

Had Dr. Boer likened the Christian Reformed Church to the servant who could present only five or two pounds, I would see no objection, but would rather underscore the aptness of the comparison. Our gains have indeed been small. But why should the church be likened to the wicked servant who out of antipathy for his Lord damaged the cause of his Master. *His gains were less than nil.* Granted for the present that our conception of the church differs from that of the New Testament, does that mean that this conception must be characterized by wickedness? Boer's comparison with the servant who hid his pound in the earth requires this conclusion. I do not doubt at all that the motive of the Christian Reformed Church in establishing "quality" membership standards was a sincere desire to guard the purity of the church and to make a better witness to the Lord Jesus. In this Boer agrees; but he says that the question is not only how "sincere and well-meant" our intentions are, but how Scriptural we are. In this I agree. But if the matter concerns the *Scripturalness* of the conception of the standards of church membership, why draw the comparison of the wicked servant? His motives were not "sincere and well-meant."

There is another item to which all of us should be provoked to further reflection and discussion. That is the view set forth by Boer and our Form for the public profession of faith.

The first question which he who professes his faith is required to answer reads as follows: "Do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and *complete* (italics added) doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God to continue in this profession?"

This can mean only one thing, namely, "quality" membership. He who answers in the affirmative says that he is in agreement with the doctrine of the Old and the New Testament, and that the doctrine taught in the church is true and complete in regards to salvation. He does not claim to have a complete grasp of all that which the Bible teaches, but in regards to salvation, he does know.

If Boer is right that simple confession of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord qualifies one for baptism and membership, then the Form for public profession of faith is wrong and should be changed.

*Very sincerely,*

(Rev. Dr.) Paul G. Schrotenboer
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

———

**Comment**

I wish to thank Dr. Schrotenboer for his appreciative words and for his criticisms. With respect to the letter I would like to make two brief observations:

1. I wholly agree that, in Dr. Schrotenboer's words, I "to some extent" compared the CRC to the unfaithful steward on the score of her witness in evangelism. I did not define this extent and therefore do not wish to assume responsibility for all the inferences and implications which he draws from my allusion. I merely affirm that we are in a large measure putting our evangelistic pound in a napkin and that therefore the comparison with the unfaithful steward is apt.

2. I hold that faith in Christ, who is the center of the Old and the New Testaments, warrants baptism and membership in the Christian Church. That is the standard which the apostles applied in their baptismal practice. If the Form for the Public Profession of Faith is understood to require a more or less extensive knowledge of the Reformed faith as a requirement for baptism then I would not hesitate to propose a revision of the Form. I do not believe, however, that a careful reading of the Form requires this understanding. We must face this question: If only "quality" believers in Christ may enter the membership of the Christian Reformed Church, where shall those who do not have "quality" go? Are we the "aristocratic" section of Christ's body? Are believers in Christ with lesser knowledge not truly His sheep, and do they not need the flock and the care of the Shepherd through the Word and the Sacraments and the pastoral office?

H. R. B.

# Letters to the Journal — Continued

September 19, 1955

DEAR SIRS:

In commenting on Dr. Harry Boer's article *Here is Thy Pound* in the July-August issue of *Journal*, I was a bit disturbed at the possible changes of our policy toward mission converts. True we cannot boast of large numbers being brought to Christ via the Christian Reformed Church. But is not the full Gospel committed to our trust and if we admit some of questionable background, are we not endangering ourselves of watering down our doctrines that we hold for truth! History also reveals what has happened to other denominations who once stood firmly on the Word of God but today have drifted away from the faith of the fathers.

Dr. Boer mentioned the fact that at the preaching of Peter at Pentecost of the large numbers who were saved. But it also mentions that the apostles were ignorant and unlearned men being filled with the Holy Ghost spoke in different tongues.

I am sure that Dr. Boer would not go so far as to say that there is therefore no need of educated ministers today. Could not the Holy Spirit who worked so mightily at the beginning of the early church also work miracles in saving so great a number at that time? I seriously question the methods some churches use for the sake of gaining large numbers of converts merely to glory in their human achievements.

Judging from the great deal of favorable response from our Back to God Hour broadcast I would say we continue as we have been doing rather than lowering our standards but to intensify our efforts toward saving those who are lost. I think we could take a few lessons from the various sects who make such large strides in getting converts to their faith by their flaming missionary zeal.

If we should decide to change our methods is there any guarantee that we would catch some of this missionary zeal?

*Sincerely yours,*

Alfred Van Schepen
Ireton, Iowa

**Reply**

I appreciate Mr. Van Schepen's concern for the continued Reformed character of the Christian Reformed Church. I feel, however, that his concern about consequences without reference to the biblical argument which I adduced is not wholesome. If the position which I presented is scriptural, why all the scruples about consequences? If it is not scriptural it should be possible to make this plain in terms of biblical teaching rather than in terms of feared consequences. I assume in all my writings on evangelism and missions that the *Bible* is our norm for *practice* as well as for faith.

H. R. B.

(Dr. Harry Boer is sailing Sept. 30 from New York for his new post in Nigeria. En route he will stop at Amsterdam. In Africa he is to organize the Teachers Training School for the Sudan United Mission, under auspices of the Christian Reformed Board of Missions. His address there will be: Teachers Training School, Gindiri, P. O. Barakin Ladi, Nigeria, West Africa. His articles will continue to appear regularly in *The Reformed Journal.* —Eds.)


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